

What Pill Do I Take?

Keeping Track Of Your Medications

(NAPSA)—There's the pill you take in the morning before breakfast, and the prescription drug that has to be taken with your morning meal. Lunch brings another round of medication, while your bedtime ritual means downing pills before turning down the bed. And let's not forget the vitamins you need each day to supplement your diet.

Sound familiar? Keeping track of which pills to take and when can be exhausting and confusing, especially for seniors who are often on multiple medications with varying schedules.

Not taking medications as directed, however, can increase the length of an illness and cause complications. It also can be expensive through increased doctor and hospital visits, longer hospital stays and increases in nursing home admissions. In fact, the 1999 report *Improving Medication Compliance: Challenges and Solutions* by Michele Cullop estimated that \$100 billion is spent annually on lost productivity and unnecessary medical costs due to patients not taking their medication as directed.

"The best thing you can do is to work with your pharmacist to understand what medications you're taking, why you're taking them, how often you must take them, and how long you need to continue taking them. Keeping a list, in your wallet or purse, of your current medications and how to take them is helpful to have as a reference, especially when traveling," said Rite Aid Pharmacist Sarah Matunis, R.Ph. "Once you have all that information, you can create a system or use a pill-organizing product to ensure you're taking each medication as prescribed by your doctor."

Many people link taking medicine with key events in their daily schedule, such as brushing their teeth or eating a meal. This works well if the schedule remains the same every day, but it can cause havoc if the schedule varies. Getting up later on weekends or hav-



ing an early dinner means your medication schedule gets thrown off, too.

"Link taking medicine to habits that you do pretty much the same time every day," said Matunis. "Some people even use visual cues, such as notes taped to mirrors or lamps, to remind themselves to take their pills when they get up or go to bed. It's amazing how creative people can get with these reminders."

There also are a number of products found in your drugstore that can help you keep track of your pills and your schedule. Pillboxes allow you to organize your medications by days of the week and even key times within each day. You simply put the different pills in the appropriate time slots for each day. Some pillboxes even have alarms that can alert you when it's the next medication-taking time. There are even medicine bottles with lids that feature a built-in alarm system. Other products include calendars where you can write your medication schedule or charts you can put on your refrigerator.

What if you don't recognize the pill you're about to take? Matunis recommends taking a sample to your Rite Aid pharmacist or calling the local poison control center. Both can identify the medication by its color and the letters or words that are on its surface.

For more information or to find the location of the nearest Rite Aid pharmacist, go to www.riteaid.com.